



Sayuki, Mimi, Rekuta, and Maruo paced nervously outside the tournament site.

"Where is Shobu?" muttered Rekuta.

"He's late, that's where he is!" complained Sayuki.

As she glanced over her friends' shoulders, Mimi's eyes popped open wide. "Wow, Mrs. Kirifuda!" she exclaimed. "You look amazing!"

The friends turned to see Shobu and his mother approaching. Mrs. Kirifuda wore a tiny cheerleading outfit in a cute shade of green. Shobu wore an embarrassed expression in a bright shade of red!



"I'm so proud of my little Shobu that I wanted him to have his very own cheering section!" said Mrs. Kirifuda. "Thought I'd do it right and break out my old cheerleading uniform from school. It still fits!"

As they headed into the building, Mimi continued to compliment Shobu's mother. "I hope I look that good when I get really old like you, Mrs. Kirifuda!"

Shobu's mom wasn't quite sure how to respond. "Thanks a lot, Mimi . . . uh, I think."





Duelists of all ages, shapes, and sizes roamed the lobby of the competition hall. Shobu thought he was dreaming again. "I've never seen so many duelists together in my life," he exclaimed. "Somebody pinch me!"

A sleazy duelist named Jamira overheard Shobu's comment. "I'll do more than pinch you, Dueler Dud. I'll send you home a big loser!"

Shobu lashed back, "You'll call me Dueler Dude after my cards shuffle you out of here, Jamira!"



"Not if I squash you before the tournament begins," exclaimed a rough, unfamiliar voice. It belonged to a duelist who was as big as a gorilla, with a face to match.

Shobu's jaw dropped in shock. Maruo leaned in and whispered, "I told you you'd be meeting some different duelists!"

"Who . . . who are you?" asked Shobu.

"I'm Takeshi Saruyama!" said the giant, with his chest puffed up in Shobu's face. "I don't need a tournament to waste you. Let's go now!"

"I'm ready," Shobu shot back. "Ikuzo!"

"Bring it on, you little stump," replied Takeshi. "Koi!"





A small crowd gathered around the pretournament duel in the hallway, excited about the unofficial competition.

Shobu is such an amateur Senpai, Jamira thought gleefully. He's going to reveal his deck now and we'll know how to beat him in the tournament!

The match was barely underway when Mimi joined Mrs. Kirifuda in a cheer. "Shobu! Shobu! He's our man! If he can't do it, no one can!"

Shobu's glare silenced them. Then he focused back on the game. "I summon Immortal Baron, Vorg! Ike!"



Takeshi scoffed and placed a mana card down. "Don't think that because you're a beginner I'm going to take it easy on you."

"Ha! You just wasted your turn!" cried Shobu.

"Why didn't he attack?" wondered Sayuki.

Rekuta was already scanning the duelist database on his laptop. "It says here Takeshi Saruyama is ranked fourth in his Senpai league, and that the strength of his deck comes from his ability to tame even the most ferocious Nature Civilization creatures."

"Ooh, a creature tamer," exclaimed Mimi, clueless to what that meant.

"If that's true," observed Maruo, "when Takeshi gets Deathblade Beetle into the battle zone, it's practically no contest."

Maruo's prediction came true . . . quickly!

"Game over, dude!" shouted Takeshi with a chuckle. "My mana cards are all in place, and now I summon





Deathblade Beetle! Do your thing, baby! Make Papa proud!"

Shobu was impressed. "Cool move, Takeshi!"

"Should he compliment his opponents' moves?" asked Mimi.

Sayuki shook her head and muttered, "At least not out loud!"

Shobu calmly placed another card down and returned play to Takeshi.

The brute yawned confidently. "This just keeps getting easier!" he bragged. "Somebody wake me when I win, because now I summon King Depthcon!"

"That's one of his most versatile creatures," exclaimed Rekuta.

Shobu gritted his teeth at that move and prepared for the worst when Takeshi shouted, "Deathblade Beetle! Double attack! Ike!"

Shobu could only grunt, realizing two of his shields had been nuked.

Now even more confident, Takeshi made a bold prediction. "Two more turns and this so-called duel will be over."

Shobu smiled calmly. "Don't be so sure about that, big guy. While you were concentrating all your



energy summoning big, powerful creatures, I summoned those that use only a little mana. Here come their attacks . . . and there go your shields!"

"I . . . I can't believe it!" stammered Takeshi.

"Shobu broke all his shields at once!" Sayuki exclaimed happily.

"He only needs a finishing blow to end the duel," said Rekuta.

But Shobu had other plans. "I don't want to beat you out here in the lobby where it doesn't count, Takeshi. I'm going to own the zone in the real tournament today!"

Takeshi skulked away, embarrassed. But he wasn't as red-faced as Shobu when his mother and Mimi started waving pom-poms and cheering, "Shobu! Shobu! He's our man! If he can't do it, no one can! Yaaay, Shobu!"

Watching from a dark corner nearby, the ever-cool Knight muttered, "I wish they'd learn another cheer."





Nine games into the tournament, an Australian duelist had Shobu against the ropes. "And now, Kirifuda, I must call forth a leviathan that swallows everything! I summon King Depthcon! Ike!"

Rekuta cringed.

Sayuki merely marveled, "Wow. That guy's good."

"Is that bad?" asked Mimi.

Sayuki rolled her eyes. "Why don't you go work on a new cheer, Mimi?"

Maruo leaned close to Sayuki. "She won't have



anything to cheer if Shobu doesn't get out of the mess he's in right now," he whispered.

"To be truthful, Shobu," admitted the Australian, "I saw your deck when you defeated that ape Takeshi in the hallway hours ago. I knew how to play you."

Shobu refused to quit. "It's not just what you've got — it's how you use it," he insisted. "I summon Scarlet Skyterror! Ike! And while you're at it, *todome da!*"

"Tomato what?" asked Shobu's mom.

"*Todome da*," Maruo explained, "It means, 'clean his clock.'"

"Another translation would be that your son just won his ninth straight tournament duel!" said Sayuki, with a wide smile. "Nice going, Shobu!"

After the shell-shocked Australian wandered away, Shobu's friends mobbed him.

Rekuta typed the final duel notes into his laptop,



then checked the tournament standings. "You're undefeated and almost in the finals, Shobu! That's fantastic!"

"Thanks," answered Shobu. "And, hey . . . how many duels have you won in your division?"

Rekuta's face puckered up. "Um . . . that would be . . . none! Zilch. Nada. I lost all ten."

Maruo patted his boy on the shoulder. "Well, that's a kind of perfect score, son."





Moments later, Shobu's excitement over his winning streak was lessened by the tournament announcer as he reported a couple of current leaders. "From Group F, here's another champion-in-the-making heading for the finals!" the announcer said. "He's undefeated in ten duels! Give it up for Jamira, folks!"

Jamira's greasy picture flashed on the big screen above the dueling floor.

As the crowd cheered, Sayuki muttered, "He probably cheated."



"Don't worry," said Shobu, "I can take him."

"Whoa, but look out, Jamiral!" the announcer continued as a new picture appeared on the screen. "Here's another dueling prodigy who's been on fire today, also winning ten duels! Going to the finals from Group H, ladies and gentlemen, it's Toru!"

The crowd applauded again.

Shobu recognized the dueler's picture. "Hey! That's the guy Kokujo clobbered before I could take him on!"

Standing nearby, Toru overheard Shobu. "You want a piece of me?" he shouted. "I'll be waiting to crush you in the finals!"

"I'll be there!" Shobu shot back.

"What makes you so sure, Kirifuda?" a familiar deep voice asked from behind Shobu. "You still have to win your tenth match."

Shobu turned around. Behind him was Takeshi, the gorilla he'd wasted in the hallway earlier. "Oh man," said Shobu. "Don't tell me I have to dump you again!"



"Well . . . uh . . . no," the embarrassed hulk mumbled. "I lost two duels."

"Why am I not surprised?" asked Sayuki.

"But since I can't play you," continued Takeshi, "you'll face the next best thing!"

A very short duelist walked up behind the bumbling behemoth — on stilts! If Takeshi looked like a gorilla, this dude was a dead-on ringer for a chimp. "I heard you've been picking on my little brother," the chimp said in a squeaky voice. "I am the great duelist Tsuyoshi Saruyama. I placed second in this tournament last year."

"So you lost your final match," taunted Shobu.

"That will not happen in this tournament," bragged Tsuyoshi. "You and I have both won nine straight duels. Now I'll step on you to get to the finals."

"I doubt it, Mr. Second Best," Shobu shot back.
"Let's duell!"

With that, Shobu's cheerleaders screamed, "See



that basket! See that rim! Come on, Shobu, put it in!
Sink it!"

Shobu freaked out. "Mom! Mimi!" he screeched.
"That's a basketball cheer! Knock it off! You're
embarrassing me!"

Nearby, Knight smiled. At least it was a different
cheer, he thought.

Disappointed, Mimi glanced at Mrs. Kirifuda.
"Maybe we should stick with, 'Shobu, Shobu, he's
our man.'"

Knight shook his head, thinking, Please . . . don't.





Shobu's picture finally flashed on the auditorium's big screen as the announcer introduced his next match. "Ladies and gentlemen, it's the final duel in Group A's preliminary round! Who will go to the finals? Last year's returning runner-up, Tsuyoshi Saruyama? Or this year's promising newcomer, Shobu Kirifuda! Prepare to battle, gentlemen!"

The crowd cheered in anticipation of the match.

"My little brother told me how you duel," Tsuyoshi sneered at Shobu. "You like to hold back the Scarlet Skyterror as your final trump card."



"So what if I do?" asked Shobu.

"So it won't work on me," Tsuyoshi replied. "My deck contains Nature Civilization cards. They're immune to Scarlet Skyterror. Or didn't you know?"

Always ready to learn from opponents, Shobu praised the squeaky little guy. "Wow! That's a sweet strategy, Tsuyoshi! Just when I think I know this game inside and out, I learn something new. I'll use that strategy myself sometime!"

Neither duelist played a cozy match, each launching a series of attacks on the other. Tsuyoshi grunted and summoned Mighty Shouter to break Shobu's shields. Shobu sent Brawler Zyler to counterattack. Tsuyoshi sicced Bronze-arm Tribe on Brawler Zyler. Shobu retaliated with Armored Walker Urherion against Tsuyoshi's shields.

As Rekuta frantically typed these moves into his laptop, Sayuki complained, "This is like a silly water



balloon fight! They're only using offensive cards, attacking full-on with every turn."

"But you have to admit, it's exciting," replied Maruo.

"Is this strategy used often in tournaments?" asked Rekuta.

"No," answered Maruo, "and Shobu's about to find out why."

"What do you mean?" asked Shobu's mom.

"It's the amount of mana they both have," explained Maruo. "Tsuyoshi has six cards in his mana zone, and Shobu only has four."

"Is that bad?" Mimi asked.

"You'll see," said Maruo.

Sure enough, Shobu suddenly realized what Tsuyoshi had set up. "Wait . . . you have . . . Bronze-arm Tribe . . . and Mighty Shouter? They're —"

"Just waking up, my little about-to-lose friend?" taunted Tsuyoshi. "Hello! Anybody home? Everyone





knows Bronze-arm Tribe gives me extra mana. And when Mighty Shouter is destroyed, it's turned into a mana card instead of going to the graveyard — where you'll soon be!"

"Because you can summon as many creatures as you want if you have enough mana," muttered Shobu, as the strategy sunk in.

The situation looked bad and was about to get worse!

"I summon Bronze-arm Tribe again!" shouted



Tsuyoshi. "I have enough mana now to wipe out anything you throw my way, and I have you to thank!"

"An Aura Blast!" exclaimed Rekuta. "It adds two thousand power to all of Tsuyoshi's creatures."

"Now here's a little something for you!" shouted Tsuyoshi with a laugh, as he crushed one of Shobu's shields.

"Oh, no! Urherion is gone!" cried Rekuta. "And Tsuyoshi's got way more creatures than Shobu! Shobu's going to lose!"

Oh dear, thought Mrs. Kirifuda. It's tough to cheer defeat.

But Shobu wouldn't give up. "Quitters never win, and winners never quit!" he declared.

"Which one is he again?" asked Mimi.

"I heard that!" Shobu called to Mimi. "Just watch. I'll show you." Then he summoned two Fire Civilization creatures: Immortal Baron, Vorg and Fatal Attacker Horvath.



Tsuyoshi wasn't scared. "Too little too late, Shobu," he sneered. "Watch and learn. I summon Roaring Great Horn!"

Many spectators cheered, expecting Shobu's defeat. "The crowd is on my side and it is time for the finishing blows," said Tsuyoshi. "I attack you with these three creatures! Break his shields!"

Shobu winced as his remaining shields were shattered.

"I won! I am the greatest! I am king!" screamed Tsuyoshi.

"He won! He is the greatest! He is king!" repeated his gorilla brother.

Shobu's mother and his friends hung their heads sadly.



Everybody thought Shobu was about to be knocked out of the tournament. Even Knight shook his head ever so slightly. He was disappointed... but he had to maintain his cool, after all. Shobu smiled calmly.

Sayuki wasn't sure how to interpret her friend's reaction. "Is that his I'm-going-to-win smile? Or his I-just-learned-a-great-lesson-while-losing smile?"

Shobu's next move answered Sayuki's question. "Don't order that crown yet, your highness," Shobu told Tsuyoshi. "I always save my best cards for



last." He quietly placed Magma Gazer down on the dueling table.

Rekuta perked up as he typed the move into his duel log. "Whoa! Magma Gazer is a spell card that gives double breaker capacity and four thousand extra power to a creature!"

"Ooh, I'm so scared," taunted Tsuyoshi, grinning broadly. "Go ahead and use your stupid double breaker. Even if you break all my shields, you won't have enough power to attack me for the win."

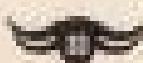
"Smile while you can," said Shobu, "because like I said, I always save my best cards for last."

Shobu placed his final card on the table.

Tsuyoshi's jaw dropped. He couldn't believe his eyes. A loud gasp rose up from the crowd when they saw the creature in close-up on the big screen.

It was another Magma Gazer!

"Magma Gazer, double breaker!" shouted Shobu. "Todome da!"



Tsuyoshi had lost.

"Who's the king now?" asked Shobu.

Embarrassed, Tsuyoshi gritted his teeth and muttered, "You won today, but I still have enough wins to go to the finals, too! You won't be so lucky next time."

Shobu's brilliant comeback victory was sealed by the announcer's official statement, "Undefeated and advancing to tomorrow's finals to compete for the title of Duel Masters Battle Arena Junior Grand Champion . . . Shobu Kirifuda!"

Now the crowd was entirely on Shobu's side. "Own it!" they screamed. "Own it! Own it!"





Dim torch-lit hallways and rooms created an eerie atmosphere in the Temple. Cold, stark stone floors and walls did little to help warm up the place. However, in a barren room containing only a small table and chair, there was a surprising splash of brilliant color.

It was teal blue.

Teal blue hair.

The bright blue hair streamed down over the shoulders of a handsome young man. He was well dressed, wearing a three-piece suit, a tie, and expensive shoes.



He idly flipped through the cards in his dueling deck as a shadowy figure entered quietly behind him.

"Bored, young one?" asked the Master in his deep, sinister voice.

As always, the Master's dark robe and hood hid most of his stern face. A patch of long blond hair spilled into view.

The young man sighed. "Another day, another uninspiring exhibition match."

"I beg to differ," said the Master. "Today's outing should prove most stimulating."

The blue-haired duelist only shrugged. "It's only Toban-Jan," he replied. "He's hardly stimulating."

"It's not your opponent I'm referring to," said the Master. "It will be a spectator. Shori Kirifuda's son. You will duel today before his first tournament finals."

"Really?" asked the young duelist. "Well, this may be interesting after all."





In a much brighter setting, Mimi wore her colorful cheerleader outfit and practiced her latest cheer. "Chili sauce and bacon fat! Come on, Shobu, swing that bat! Go, Shobu!"

Now also wearing the official Kirifuda cheerleader outfit, Sayuki rejected Mimi's choice of cheers. "That needs a major rewrite, Mimi. This isn't baseball!"

"What's baseball?" asked Mimi.

They were interrupted by the sound of excitement in the competition hall below. Peering over the bal-



cony rail, Shobu saw a crowd of screaming girls running to their seats. "What's happening?" he asked.

Sayuki's eyes fluttered excitedly. "Oh! It must be about to start!"

"I'm so glad we grabbed these front-row seats!" shouted Mimi.

"We'll be on top of everything!" said Rekuta.

"On top of what?" asked Shobu, totally clueless.

"Duh! Hakuoh's exhibition match!" said Sayuki.

"Whacko who?" asked Shobu.

"Ha-ku-oh," corrected Rekuta. "How can you call yourself a duelist, and not know the name of the world champion?"

"He's so totally dreamy," said Sayuki with a sigh.

"So totally superdreamy," agreed Mimi, with a bigger sigh.

Rekuta's father praised Hakuoh's statistics more than his blue hair. "He's undefeated in official play,"



said Maruo, "and the strongest player in the Duel Center. He's brilliant!"

"And totally superdreamy," added Mimi.

"I heard you the first time," said Shobu, annoyed and a little jealous. "What's so great — ?"

The announcer interrupted. "Ladies and gentlemen, we have a rare treat for you this afternoon before we begin our Junior Duelist tournament finals! You'll see a special exhibition match with a duelist who can really own the zone!"

"Not my zone!" scoffed Shobu.

"This young man really needs no introduction," the announcer continued. "His luminous three-piece suit and teal-blue hair says it all! He's undefeated, undisputed, and under contract to several major hair-care and apparel companies. You know him, you love him! Ladies and gentlemen, Hakuoh!"

The crowd went nuts, including Shobu's mother. "My, he's quite — "



"Yeah, I know, Mom . . .," broke in Shobu.
"Dreamy."

Mimi, Sayuki, and Shobu's mother jumped to their feet. "Five foot two-oh, hair of blue-oh. Who's the best? It is Hakuoh!"

Shobu buried his head in his hands and muttered, "So much for, 'Shobu! Shobu! He's our man!'"

Hakuoh made a grand entrance between two groups of men dressed in white. They were three rows deep on each side and standing at attention.

"Wow!" said Rekuta. "There's Hakuoh's dueling team — the White Soldiers. Strongest in the world."

"Vanity, thy name is Hakuoh," said Shobu. "Is this a duel or a Vegas floor show? I can't believe I have to delay my first tournament finals for this!"

"And now . . .," the announcer rumbled over the loudspeakers, "give it up for Hakuoh's worthy opponent! He's a duelist who really cooks, in and out of the arena. He's got a wok and he's not afraid to

use it. You may know him from his fabulous line of frozen cuisines, but today he's hoping to serve up a little crow. Please welcome the champion from China, Toban-Jan!"

Through a cloud of smoke and fire, Toban-Jan also entered the arena with pizzazz. He pointed at Hakuoh, shouting, "Hey! I came all the way from Shanghai to cook you! And nothing's easier to prepare than ham!"

Rekuta's fingers zipped across his laptop keyboard. "I checked the net for Toban-Jan's stats. Wow, he's finished nearly every duel within 10 minutes!"

"So he's a swift attacker," said Shobu.

Rekuta read the screen. "Yep. His specialties are swift attacks with a deck full of Fire Civilization cards."

"Just like Shobu," said Maruo.

"Just like me," mumbled Shobu. He leaned forward over the railing. The match had suddenly become much more interesting.





Both duelists began loading their mana zones. Finally, Toban-Jan cried, "Let's throw a couple of shrimp on the barbie! I summon Brawler Zyler and Fatal Attacker Horvath."

Hakuoh countered by summoning Dia Nork, Moonlight Guardian.

Rekuta frantically typed the moves into his database. "Hakuoh summoned a blocker. Cool!"

"He knows his way around," agreed Maruo. "Now Toban-Jan has to attack carefully."



Shobu smiled. "But don't underestimate a guy who can pull so much cutlery out of his pants!"

"Now it's time to use my secret ingredient," shouted Toban-Jan. "I summon Rothus the Traveler!"

"Great move," whispered Shobu. "Toban-Jan is a man with a plan! Each card has to send one of his creatures to the graveyard! Brawler Zyler's out, but now Dia Nork is gone too. Big turnaround!"

"The oil is just hot enough for frying and something smells delicious!" Toban-Jan shouted happily. "Here comes the specialty of the house — Fatal Attacker Horvath! Ike!"

"There goes one of Hakuoh's shields," said Sayuki.

"Thank goodness it didn't mess up his hair," whispered Mimi.

As the match progressed, Rekuta discovered more interesting statistics on his laptop. "That last attack



by Toban-Jan is one Shobu's used twelve times.
They're more alike than I thought!"

"Doesn't surprise me," said Maruo, "Their deck structures are almost identical."

Hearing that, Shobu moved to the edge of his seat, drawn into the contest as though he was dueling Hakuoh himself!



Shobu winced as Hakuoh climbed back into the match by summoning two blockers — Emerald Grass and Senatine Jade Tree. "Toban-Jan could crush those blockers with Scarlet Skyterror," he said.

"Oh, I love that band!" squealed Mimi.

Sayuki rolled her eyes. "Mimi, what color is the sky in your world? Scarlet Skyterror is a card!" Then she turned to Shobu. "I hear you, but Toban-Jan needs a lot more mana to summon Scarlet Skyterror."

"You're right," agreed Rekuta, typing duel moves

into one window while checking statistics in another. "Both have played the same number of years and Hakuoh is undefeated. But if Toban-Jan can hang in there until he has enough mana to summon Scarlet Skyterror —"

"He can win!" Shobu exclaimed.

But just after Toban-Jan served up Armored Walker Urherion, Hakuoh rocked the auditorium with his counter move.

"Yikes!" cried Shobu. "Urth, Purifying Elementall It's an Angel Command with six thousand power."

On Toban-Jan's turn, he could only lay a card in his mana zone.

Play went back to Hakuoh. "I now summon Szubs Kin, Twilight Guardian," he declared.

Shobu was astounded. "Am I seeing straight?" he asked. "Hakuoh just summoned another blocker using five mana!"



Maruo smiled. "Takes your breath away doesn't it? It's Hakuoh's favorite formation, called The White Terror."

"Shobu looks nervous," Mimi whispered to Rekuta.

"Hakuoh might defeat a deck and strategy very close to his own," Rekuta answered.

Sure enough, Hakuoh made his move. "Urth, Purifying Elemental. Ike! Double-break his shields."

"There go two of Toban-Jan's shields," said Rekuta. "His goose is cooked."

"Pretty Boy hasn't won yet," replied Shobu.

Though he couldn't have heard him, Toban-Jan certainly agreed with Shobu. "Do you find my cooking bland, Hakuoh?" he joked. "Well, let's kick it up a notch with my secret seasoning. I summon Super Explosive Volcanodon!"

"You're still no match for me," taunted Hakuoh.

No match, my apron! thought Toban-Jan. My spice rack isn't empty yet. I've still got Scarlet Skyterror!



Shobu pondered Toban-Jan's strategy as if it were his own. If he has Scarlet Skyterror, he'll send all of Hakuoh's blockers to the graveyard! Then he'll break his shields easily. He just needs one more mana and he wins!

"The next turn, I'll be feasting on victory," insisted Toban-Jan confidently. "And you'll be eating crow, Hakuoh!"

But Hakuoh had one final trick up his sleeve. He calmly played a card, declaring, "Holy Awe. Finish it."

Shobu's jaw dropped. "I've seen that play before! Knight used it on me the first time I played him! Holy Awe is a spell that taps all of an opponent's cards. Now all of Toban-Jan's creatures are vulnerable!"

Hakuoh took advantage of that vulnerability. "I attack with Urth, Purifying Elemental! Ike! Next, I attack with Szubs Kin, Twilight Guardian. Ike! Now, Emerald Grass attack! Ike! And Senantine Jade Tree, attack! Ike!"



Hakuoh smiled and turned play over to Toban-Jan, who made a final effort to win, sending all Hakuoh's blockers to the graveyard. But the price was too great. In the end, Toban-Jan didn't have enough creatures to attack Hakuoh! Finally, Toban-Jan slumped. "Stick a fork in me, baby. I'm done."

The crowd — including Shobu's cheerleaders — went wild, shouting Hakuoh's name over and over.

Shobu was crushed. "All we needed was one more turn."

"All I needed was one more turn," mumbled Toban-Jan. "Nice work, Hakuoh. You're one sharp duelist."

The blue mop-head sneered at his defeated foe. "I wish I could say the same about you."

The announcer closed the exhibition. "Junior duelists, that should psych you up for some intense finals play, and we'll announce the match-ups in just



a bit. But first, let's put our hands together for two terrific duelists — Toban-Jan and the still-undefeated Hakuoh!"

Despite the wild crowd noise, Maruo's mind jumped to the junior tournament about to resume. "We'd better get you focused on your own play, Shobu," he said, turning toward the boy.

But Shobu was gone!





Down on the dueling floor, the crowd scrambled to catch a final glimpse of Hakuoh. Shobu scrambled harder, pushing through the throng. "Hey, Hakuoh! Wait up!" he shouted.

Shobu broke past Hakuoh's body guards, nearly reaching the duelist champ before two White Soldiers snatched him into the air. Hakuoh turned to see what the disturbance was about.

"I have to admit, Hakuoh," said Shobu, "you owned the zone today! But I'm about to win the



junior tournament, and after I do, I want to duel you! I'm calling you out! Kettou dai!"

Hakuoh calmly brushed some blue hair out of his eyes. "And you are . . . ?" he asked.

"I'm Shobu Kirifuda! You'll be hearing a lot about me soon!"

Hakuoh smiled, turned, and walked away without a word.

Shobu struggled to free himself, while shouting at Hakuoh. "Hey! Come on! This is no way to treat a future champion! Wait! You forgot to give me your phone number! I'll call you! We'll do lunch at the Temple!"

Hakuoh never looked back.





In a dark hallway under the stadium, Hakuoh met Knight, who was casually leaning against the wall. "So that's Shobu Kirifuda," he said.

"Mm-hmm," replied Knight quietly.

"Spirited little tyke," said Hakuoh. "Reminds me of myself, before the weight of reality smashed my joyful, childlike innocence. It will be a pity when I have to crush him."

"Yeah, he's young and rough around the edges," said Knight. "But his potential is absolutely staggering. Trust me on this one."



Hakuoh dismissed Knight's opinion with a wave of his hand. "Whatever. Why don't you stop by the Temple some time for a game? I could use some real competition."

Knight shook his head. "Be patient, Hakuoh," he muttered. "I promise you, you will get it."

Without looking back, Hakuoh resumed walking over to his waiting helicopter.





Whirring helicopter propellers nearly drowned out the beep of Hakuoh's picture phone. He flipped it open to reveal the Master calling from his gloomy Temple office.

"You're returning already?" asked the Master.

"Yes," said Hakuoh. "I toyed with Toban-Jan until he was one move from winning. It's much more fun to give opponents hope, and then crush their spirits as I steal victory."

"I don't want you overexposed," said the Master,

"but you might have enjoyed the finalists dueling for the junior championship."

Hakuoh shook his head. "They're not worth watching," he replied with a smirk.

"Not even Shobu Kirifuda?" teased the Master.

"That little wannabe?" scoffed Hakuoh. "He chased me through the tournament hall, shouting challenges. Sure, he's plucky and feisty, but nothing special."

The Master's long blond hair spilled out of the hood of his robe, covering half of his sinister smile. "But the same could have been said of you once, young one."

"Should he become a real contender," said Hakuoh, "I'll crush him easily."

The Master grinned wickedly. "I have no doubt."





Back at the tournament arena, the excitement of Hakuoh's exhibition match had given way to a new brand of mayhem. Shobu's friends were so ready for the junior competition that even Rekuta Kadoko and his father, Maruo, were wearing cheerleader uniforms! Surprisingly, they didn't look much stranger than many of the duelists competing in the final rounds, but both were embarrassed by their outfits.

"Ladies and gentlemen," shouted the announcer, "the Duel Masters Battle Arena Junior Tournament is



about to resume! We're down to the final 'Sweet Sixteen' duelists, one of whom will win only four more matches to be crowned champion!"

"That will be my Shobu!" said Mrs. Kirifuda proudly.

"Let me start by introducing a few of the top-scoring contenders," continued the announcer. "First, here's the prince of panache, the sultan of suave, the heir with green hair... let's have a warm round of applause for Toru!"

The spotlight hit the red carpet and Toru marched in, soaking up the applause like a sponge, while carefully maintaining his tough sneer.

"You know, from these seats, he doesn't look so tough," said Mr. Kadoko. "Or do I need new glasses?"

Typing stats into his laptop, Rekuta rolled his eyes. "Let's go with the latter on that one, Pop. You're lucky to see past your nose."



"And here's the king of the jungle himself . . ."

cried the announcer. "Tsuyoshi Saruyama!"

The monkey-faced little duelist stalked the red carpet on his stilts, and wowed the crowd with a forward flip dismount.

But not everyone was impressed. Shobu's cheerleaders raised cards grading Tsuyoshi's dismount a dismal 1.0.

"He lost to Shobu yesterday," grumbled Rekuta, "and they introduce him second?"

"He's dueled longer, son," said Maruo. "Show some respect."

"I'll respect him right out of the tournament if he faces Shobu again," muttered Rekuta.

Another competitor entered the auditorium. "Up next," said the announcer, "the duelist with a wicked sting! Jamira, the Viper King!"

Jamira's spiked red hair and orange and green outfit were colorful . . . to say the least!



"Hey!" shouted Sayuki. "Is this a circus or a dueling tournament? That clown switched decks on Shobu in the park the other day!"

"Viper King, my foot," said Mimi. "He's just a cheater!"

After a squawk of feedback, the announcer continued. "Next, put your hands together for twin brothers, Bobbie and Robbie, who gave up successful careers as clothes models to compete here!"

"Now we have a fashion show!" scoffed Sayuki. "Let's see a real player!"

Her demand was answered immediately. The announcer shouted, "And lastly, a duelist who's undefeated through yesterday's first rounds. Let's greet this fantastic newcomer, Shobu Kirifudal!"

As Shobu made his way to the center of the arena, the crowd went wild. He'd definitely gained some fans. His cheerleaders bounced up and down,



waving pom-poms and screaming, "Go, Shobu, go, Shobu. Go, go, go, Shobu. Yay!"

After the cheer, Sayuki critiqued Rekuta. "You need to kick higher," she said.

"Actually, I need therapy," moaned Rekuta, sitting down and hiding his face behind his laptop's screen.





The matchup of Toru and Tsuyoshi promised to be as interesting as it was weird. Both hoped to be in the championship match and to find Shobu there. But only one would advance to the quarterfinals.

Their contest was heated to say the least, but now Tsuyoshi was in trouble. "I summon Deathblade Beetle!" he shouted.

Unfortunately, the move was too little too late. Toru sneered. "Ha!" he exclaimed. "It's going to take more than a big bug to squash me." Then he



commanded an attack. "Burning Mane! Ike! Break his shields!" The crowd roared, but Toru wasn't finished. "Now I call Fear Fang. Todome da!"

Tsuyoshi keeled over on his stilts. He was toast. Toru was moving on to the next round.

Nearby, Jamira also had his opponent — an average-looking kid named Ikito — on the ropes. "You'll never win with plain hair and clothes!" taunted Jamira. "You need exciting style, like this spell card I'm about to play. Death Smoke, nuke his blocker!"

Ikito winced, realizing the end was near.

"Time to say 'bye-bye,'" Jamira yelled. "Swamp Worm. Todome da!"

Ikito was history. Jamira was only three steps from the championship and the cheering crowd lifted his confidence. "I will be champion!" he shouted. He strutted and pointed to his head. "The hair will be there! I will not lose again!"

But beneath his confident crowing, Jamira was a



nervous wreck. I can't afford to lose again! he thought.

If he lost, he would have to face severe consequences.



A week earlier, Jamira had approached the Temple for some practice duels, but guards in hooded robes blocked his entry.

"Hey, let me in!" he demanded.

"No way," replied a guard. "You dress funny, your spiky red hair is a joke, and you leave the cap off the toothpaste!"

"Come on," objected Jamira. "What's the real reason?"

A mysterious woman, whose face was hidden by



the hood of a Temple robe, called to Jamira from the door. "You disgraced the Temple when you lost to Shobu Kirifuda," she explained. "You couldn't even beat him by cheating."

"He got lucky!" exclaimed Jamira. "Give me another chance! No way will he beat me again."

He tried to push past the guards, but they shoved him to the ground.

"Let me talk to the Master," pleaded Jamira. "He'll back me up."

"Defeat Shobu Kirifuda at the Duel Masters Junior Tournament next week," replied the woman, "and you'll be allowed back into the Temple. Don't ever return if you lose!" Then she slammed the enormous door with a loud crash.





Shobu defeated his first opponent quickly, and advanced to the quarterfinals. His current opponent was a weird, geeky dude called The Brain. A typically flamboyant duelist, he wore thick glasses, a lime green sport coat, purple pants, and polka-dot bow tie. Regardless of wardrobe, Shobu always focused on an opponent's skills. And he'd seen enough to know The Brain's game was lame!

"Bolshack Dragon, Iket! Attack!" shouted Shobu. Then he delivered the knockout punch. "And now, Brawler Zyler, todome da!"



The Brain went insane, staggering backward with his bow tie spinning. Shobu was a semifinalist. He'd made the final four!

His personal cheering section erupted. "Shobu, Shobu ruled the duel! He just took The Brain to school! Go, Shobu!"

Nearby, the ever-cool Knight nodded with grudging appreciation for the cheer. They're getting better, he thought.

By now many girls thought Shobu was the cutest new duelist. A group of them shouted their own cheer. "Shobu, Shobu! He's so hot! He just showed us what he's got! Go, Shobu!"

"Hey!" Mimi objected, feeling a little jealous. "That's not an authorized Shobu cheer! And they're not wearing official Shobu cheerleader uniforms!"

Still embarrassed, Rekuta muttered, "I've got one they can have."

His father nodded. "Me, too."





The first semifinal match pitted Jamira against Shobu. Rekuta checked his laptop's database and quickly reminded everyone that Jamira used Nature cards effectively.

"Not as effectively as he switches decks before a duel!" added Sayuki sarcastically.

Down on the arena floor, the same thought occurred to Shobu as he shuffled his cards. "Plan on cheating again, Jamira?"

"Don't have to," replied the obnoxious redhead. "I've done my homework."



"Think you know my deck, huh?" asked Shobu.

Fearing the Master's judgment, Jamira had studied much more than Kirifuda's duelist moves. He'd spied on Shobu in school, after school, in the dueling park, and even in his home! Then he concocted plans to put Shobu off balance.

"Oh, I know a lot more about you than your passion for Bolshack Dragon," Jamira replied with a sly grin. "I have multiple strategies to mess with your head."

"Multiple strategies, huh?"

"Yep," said Jamira, "the first is called 'No Detention, please.'"

Shobu was puzzled as Jamira turned and waved at a sweet little old lady in the front row. He called to her in a devilish tone. "Oh, Miss Crumbcrock, wave to Shobu!"

Miss Crumbcrock popped up excitedly, waved her cane, and shouted, "Shobu, Shobu! You're my boy! Treat Jamira like a toy! Go, Shobu!"



"Another unauthorized cheer," grumbled Mimi. "Competition is spreading."

"What are you going to do?" Sayuki asked Mimi sarcastically. "Send Miss Crumbcrock to cheerleader detention?"

Hearing the schoolteacher's support for Shobu, Jamira's jaw dropped. He adjusted his vest nervously. "But . . . but . . . you . . . you can't duel in front of her! I saw! She slaps you with detention if you even think about your cards in her class!"

"Oh, that's only in school," said Shobu. "Outside class, Miss Crumbcrock is one of my biggest fans. We duel in detention. If you're not careful, she can drown you with her wicked Water deck. Got any other surprises for me?"

Jamira gritted his teeth and growled, "You bet, loser. I have more tricks up my sleeve."

"That would be great," said Shobu, "if your shirt had sleeves."





Shields ready, Ikuzo!" shouted Shobu.
"Deploy shields, Koi!" Jamira answered.

Jamira opened with a bold move. "I call this strategy 'What a Waste,'" he said with a cackle. He used Shobu's favorite card, Bolshack Dragon, to charge mana.

The crowd ooed. Shobu's friends aahed.
Jamira just snickered weirdly. "What are you going to do now that I've turned your favorite card into mana?"



Shobu calmly answered the move. "Well, I guess I'll turn this card into mana," he said.

Rekuta frantically typed the move into the duel log. "Oh my gosh! Shobu's also used Bolshack Dragon as mana!"

Flabbergasted, Jamira shouted, "Hey! What's the matter with you? You don't want to use that card as mana."

"Why not?" Shobu replied calmly. "You did."

"But . . . but . . . but that's my strategy," he stammered. "You can't steal it!"

"Take it as a compliment," said Shobu.

Knight smiled, adjusting his sunglasses. Impressive counter move, he thought. The kid can really think on his feet.

"The match has really taken a turn," said Mr. Kadoko.

"I think Shobu's lost his mind, wasting Bolshack Dragon like that," moaned Rekuta.



"Relax and keep typing," said Sayuki. "It was a cool copycat move and Shobu has a plan."

Out of the blue, Mimi inquired, "What rhymes with dragon?"

"Why do you ask, dear?" asked Shobu's mom.

"We need an appropriate cheer," Mimi answered.



Shobu now had Onslaught Triceps and the double breaker power of Gatling Skyterror in play. Jamira saw the match slipping away, despite his secret strategies. He made one last effort to psych Shobu into defeat, intertwining his arms and raising them in the air. Then he gyrated, twisted, and wiggled his body, all the while staring hypnotically into Shobu's eyes.

The crowd howled with laughter, but Miss Crumbcrock quickly grew impatient. "What is this?" she



shouted. "A belly dance or a duel? Play your cards, you deadhead redhead!"

"Wow!" Rekuta exclaimed. "Miss Crumbcrock is never that cool when she's teaching social jurisprudence!"

"But why is Jamira wiggling like a worm?" wondered Rekuta's dad.

"He looks more like a snake," countered Shobu's mom. "I don't like snakes around my son."

Rekuta quickly scanned his database. "It's Jamira's Viper Dance! Says here that some believe he hypnotizes opponents with it. Other analysts think it just bores the competition to death. Either way, the opposing duelist's brain is fried, and Jamira wins the duel."

Jamira saw that his slithering and snakelike gaze was affecting Shobu. "While studying with duelists in Tibet," he said, "I learned how cobras lure frogs to their deadly fangs."



A blank expression fell over Shobu's face and his eyes glazed over. "I am not a frog," he mumbled in a slow monotone.

Jamira wriggled and stared even harder. "But you feel like one, don't you?"

"Yes," Shobu admitted, nodding his head slowly.

Rekuta studied the scene below. "What are we going to do, Pop?"

Mr. Kadoko's eyes were glazed, too. "I . . . feel . . . like a frog," he answered slowly.

"Not the advice we were looking for!" said Rekuta.

"Your mind is growing weak under my spell," Jamira chanted to Shobu. "You are confused. You can no longer duel."

Come on, kid, Knight thought. Snap out of it. Believe in yourself!

Deep in Shobu's mind, he heard a voice repeating



a single phrase. "Believe in yourself. Believe in yourself." The voice grew louder and louder.

Jamira could see that Shobu was fighting his spell and tried to finish him off before he could snap out of it. "You can no longer duel," he intoned in a steady, commanding voice. "You must forfeit the match. You believe me, don't you?"

"I believe in myself!" Shobu suddenly shouted. His eyes popped open. He'd broken the trance and was ready to rock. "And no sneaky strategy is better than a quick attack! Gatling Skyterror! Iket! Double break his shields! Triceps, attack! Todome da!"

Jamira the Viper had just been defanged. Shobu would duel Toru for the championship. Jamira slithered away, defeated. "With all my Tibetan training," he mumbled, "how could I lose?"

"When it comes to winning," answered Shobu, "nothing beats hard work and determination."



The crowd roared. A group of girls cheered, "We love Shobu! True romance! He just beat the Viper Dance! Go, Shobu!"

Mimi sighed. "Another unauthorized cheer, but they're good," she admitted. "If we can't beat 'em, maybe we should join 'em."

Best news I've heard in a while, thought Knight.



Shobu and his pals waited for the final match in a room beneath the arena. Sayuki and Mrs. Kirifuda paced nervously. Rekuta scanned his computer for more data on Toru. Mimi frantically tried to invent more cheers. Over in a corner, Miss Crumbercock practiced kung-fu moves with her cane.

Shobu was playing it cool. Maybe too cool. "What are you worried about?" he said calmly. "No way am I going to lose the championship duel."

"Don't be overconfident," Sayuki chided. "It makes you careless."

"She's right," declared Mr. Kadoko. "Terrible trouble comes in many disguises."

Immediately, trouble entered the room in a terrible disguise. Unfortunately, the group was too preoccupied to recognize Jamira, who was wearing a pink dress, a wide brimmed hat, makeup, and a horrible shade of lipstick. He tottered unsteadily in high heels, and carried a tray of canned soft drinks.

In a squeaky voice, Jamira said, "I'm a big fan of Shobu's, so I brought his favorite soft drink, Gagalot Cola! I thought you'd want some refreshment before the big duel."

"Wow!" exclaimed Shobu. "Gagalot? Thanks a lot!"

"You're gaga-welcome," squeaked Jamira. Then he quickly left. No one noticed his satisfied sneer under his horrible shade of lipstick.

Shobu pounded down two cans of Gagalot in seconds. He wiped his lips and burped loudly. "See? The public has spoken. I'll be the people's duelist.



Everyone will like me, and my deck will be encased in the Smithsonian."

Sayuki rolled her eyes. "Oh, gaga-please! Lose the big head, Kirifuda. Toru's a great duelist, too."

Shobu chugged his third Gagalot, then shook the rafters with a blasting belch.

"If your nerves don't give you the shakes," said his mother, "all that sugar will!"

"I found something that might give Shobu the jitters," said Rekuta. "My research says Toru's deck is a combination of Water and Nature cards, but he doesn't seem to have a trump card, like Shobu does with Bolshack Dragon."



"Maybe he doesn't use one," commented Sayuki.

"Or he's held it back to surprise you in the champi-



onship duel!" added Mr. Kadoko. "Either way, I've watched Toru at my card shop since Kokujo destroyed him that day. His deck has definitely evolved for the better since then."

"Let's hope it isn't evolving in his waiting room right now!" declared Rekuta.

"Toru acts tough," answered Sayuki, "but I don't think he's a cheater."

"Well, the match will start soon," said Mrs. Kirifuda. "Let's give Shobu some time to himself."

As they left the room, Miss Crumbcrock shouted, "Rule the duel, Shobu! Or it's detention all next week!"



Excitement ran through the arena, as the "official" cheerleading squad shouted, "Shobu, Shobu, he's our man! If he can't do it, no one can! Go, Shobu!"

That was answered quickly by the "unofficial" cheerleaders. "We just think it's really sad. Your Shobu cheers are very bad! Go, Shobu!"

Rekuta slumped, embarrassed. "This is getting worse, Pop."

"So true," mumbled Mr. Kadoko.

Mimi's cell phone rang.



Rekuta brightened. "Great! Cheering interrupted."

Mimi spoke on the phone for a bit, and then snapped it shut. "Um . . . I have to go," she said.

"Are you kidding?" asked Sayuki. "Shobu's biggest match ever is about to start!"

"Sorry," Mimi apologized. Then she darted up the arena steps toward an exit.

"She's probably going to negotiate a merger with the 'unofficial' cheerleaders," mumbled Rekuta.

"Anything that'll get us out of these outfits is fine with me," replied his dad.





Toru sat alone in a different waiting room, flipping through his deck and mentally reviewing each card. Use it. Use it. Don't use it. Use it.

He was interrupted by a knock on the door. Toru expected a tournament official, but was surprised by a mysterious woman. She wore a hooded cloak that covered her face, looking quite like the person who'd banished Jamira from the Temple a week earlier.

"I bring you an order from the Master," she whispered, holding out a duelist's deck. "You will



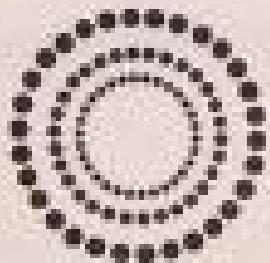
abandon your deck for the final match and use this one which we have chosen for you."

"Why?" asked Toru, shocked.

"The Master doesn't believe you can defeat Shobu with your deck," answered the stranger.

"No way!" cried Toru. "Changing a deck mid-tournament is forbidden! It's cheating!"

"Those I represent have the power to bend the rules," the woman said calmly. "Now take it. This is an exact replica of Mr. Hakuoh's Light Civilization deck. Use it and you'll win."



Toru frowned as he thought about the offer.

The cloaked woman placed the new deck on the



table next to him. "Pick up the cards and learn to follow orders. This is the will of the Temple. If you obey, you'll be much better off. If you don't, you'll be expelled from the Temple."

"Do you know how long it took me to build my own deck?" muttered Toru. "And now you say I can't use it? What kind of a quitter do you think I am?"

"I'll be watching you," said the woman. "Obey the Temple and use this deck. You want to be champion, don't you?"

The woman left the room quietly, leaving Toru glancing back and forth at the two decks on the table.



Shobu studied his own deck in deep thought. *Toru's probably hiding his trump card, he realized. What kind of strategy wouldn't need one? Either way, I won't cheat by changing my deck. Better to play for fun than try to win at any cost. Besides, I believe in my deck and I'm ready to rumble!*

But Shobu's stomach was ready to rumble, too! Suddenly all that Gagalot Cola raised a ruckus. He needed a men's room. Fast!

Shobu bolted from the waiting room and dashed up the hallway.



Still wearing a pink dress, Jamira emerged from a dark corner and wobbled up the hallway in pursuit of Shobu. He'd barely learned to walk in high heels, let alone run in them!



"Welcome to the Junior Duelists Championship Match, ladies and gentlemen," shouted the announcer. "It's time now to meet our final two contestants! With the funny green hair and villainlike demeanor . . . welcome Toru Kamiya!"

Toru marched up the red carpet in the spotlight, waving to his fans.

"New to the tournament scene, this young man is a surprising finalist!" the announcer continued. "Let's welcome a talented player with even funnier hair — Shobu Kirifuda!"



The spotlight flashed on the arena entrance and the crowd went wild.

But the rabid cheers soon hushed to an eerie silence.

Where was Shobu?





Hands tied behind his back, Shobu lay on the men's room floor. Jamira cackled uncontrollably as he stole Shobu's dueling deck.

"It's payback time, Kirifuda. Too bad you like Gagalot Cola as much as winning duels. This is where you really belong! In the toilet! Now you'll be a loser, just like you made me!"

A strong hand gripped Jamira's wrist, forcing him to drop the cards.

It was Knight to the rescue!

"Just because you lost, doesn't mean you have to



stay a loser," Knight told Jamira. "Now show some character and untie Shobu. He has a championship to win, while you go home and figure out how to beat him next time you duel."



Sayuki and Rekuta returned to the arena seats. "We went in opposite directions," said Rekuta, "but we couldn't find Shobu anywhere."

"Oh, no!" cried Shobu's mom. "The judge is approaching the microphone. They're going to disqualify Shobu!"

"Wait!" screamed Shobu. He dashed into the arena, "Wait! I'm here! Let's duel!"

The crowd went wild as both competitors took their places across from each other. Shobu placed his deck on the table. "Okay, Toru. Let's keep this match



fair and square. Let me see the deck you've built that will destroy me!"

Toru reached into his right pocket, then hesitated. Then he pulled a deck from the left pocket. Each shuffled the other's deck and the match was on.

Shobu opened by charging mana. Toru did the same with a Water Civilization card.

From a dark corner of the arena, the mysterious woman shook her head. Toru had disobeyed the Master and was playing with his own deck.

Shobu then charged mana and summoned Immortal Baron, Vorg.

"I charge mana," Toru answered, "and summon Aqua Vehicle."

Rekuta typed the duel moves into his database. "Toru's card has only one thousand power," he said. "Shobu should defeat it easily."

Shobu did just that. "I charge mana and summon



Brawler Zyler! Immortal Baron, Vorg! Ike! Break his shields!"

Toru had lost a shield, but quickly countered. "I summon Bronze-arm Tribe."

Sayuki was impressed. "Smooth move by Toru," she said. "His increased mana will come in handy. Shobu better be careful."